Teaching Leadership: Do Students Remember and Utilize the Concepts We Teach?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how leadership competencies are remembered and utilized following instruction in a structured collegiate leadership course. The population for this study consisted of experienced collegiate leaders who completed an introductory leadership theory course. The purposive sample included 74 students who completed the course during a semester within a three year period. For this study, a three-part instrument was used. The study focused on the comprehension and use of leadership competencies presented in the course. Comparisons were made between the different classes in regards to self-perceived leadership competency knowledge (retained comprehension) as well as self-perceived leader competency use. Results showed statistically significant differences were found among students and self-perceived knowledge of Task v. Relationship and Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid. Findings also showed that there was no statistically significant difference between self-perceived leadership competency use and the number of years post collegiate leadership course.

Introduction

Over the past 30 years there has been an increase of interest in leadership from researchers and the business world. Leadership models have been developed along with numerous leadership theories that aim to make leadership a functional subject. Leadership scholars know that leadership theory can be taught (Bennis, 1994), but not a substantial amount of research has looked at the retention and use of these theories.

As teachers, we hope that our students are retaining what we are teaching. The purpose of this study is to determine how well selected leadership competencies were remembered and utilized one, two, and three years after the completion of a structured collegiate leadership course.

For this study, two hypotheses will be discussed. Hypothesis one stated: Following participation in a structured, collegiate leadership class, there is no difference in student perception of selected leadership competency knowledge among students enrolled in the 2000, 2001, or 2002 classes. The second hypothesis was developed to ascertain the difference between self-perceived leadership competency use one, two, and three years after participation in a collegiate leadership course.

Theoretical Framework

It has been suggested that leadership not only has a setting, but an historical framework as well as wholeness of meaning and diversity of influences (Thomas & Bainbridge, 2002). Leadership is a discipline like all other disciplines in the fact that there are constant discussions and scholarly debate over theories and ideas. One issue that is constantly being pondered revolves around the question "are leaders born or made." Most leadership scholars believe that it a little of both. Leaders are born with some characteristics that make them more effective, but proper instruction and experience shapes leader success. The "making" of leaders is also entitled leadership education. Inasmuch as it involves learning activities and educational environments intended to enhance and foster leadership abilities (Brungardt, 1996).

Many institutions of higher education have, within the last decade, realized the importance of formal leadership education. In 1996, Brungardt reported that there were between 200 and 500 colleges and universities that offered leadership development programs. Since 1996, the numbers have only increased and four-year degree programs are now offered at many leading institutions. Astin and Astin (2000) indicate that leadership development is important and useful. It enriches the undergraduate experience, empowers students, and gives them an increased sense of control over their lives.

Experiential Leadership Education

One of the important factors in a successful leadership education program is integrated and structured activities. Flaum (2002) notes the true practice of leadership is most authentically reflected in the leadership moment." Although most leadership education courses or seminars cannot provide the participant with an actual leadership "moment," the use of active learning techniques along with case studies and simulations can imitate leadership moments.

Secondary schools have been teaching leadership for an extended period of time through the FFA program. Dodson (1995) investigated the effectiveness of leadership education by studying students who enrolled in a high school FFA (agriculture) course that included a leadership component. Dodson discovered that high school students found leadership simulation activities effective in learning leadership and life skill knowledge. Dodson also ascertained that leadership skills could be taught using simulation activities to students of all ages. Also established was the fact that high school students believed the leadership activities to be valuable and interesting as well as stimulating. There were perceived to be a great help to learning and the activities made them think.

In another study, agricultural education researchers again considered the importance of practical applications given along with leadership theory. While studying collegiate leadership courses, Bruck (1997) investigated field dependency and the new leadership paradigm of teams and group-centered leadership. The results of this study yielded the recommendation that college students should enroll in leadership course which teaches theory and includes activities simulating leadership problems.

McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1998) surveyed Fortune 500 companies and found that the crucial way to maximize leadership potential was to make the most of one's experiences. The people surveyed from these successful companies stated that learning came from challenging assignments, supervisory experiences, and personal and professional hardships. McCall et al. also found that in the midst of considerable pressure in challenging jobs significant learning occurred because people were likely to observe and reflect on what worked and what did not.

Evaluation of Leadership Programs

Assessment and evaluation is an important aspect of furthering leadership as an academic discipline (Brungardt & Crawford, 1996). Holding this notion in mind, leadership educators are focused on researching ways to improve leadership education.

Dailey (1999) tested the real life application of leadership skills. This study centered around collegiate, non-teacher certified Agricultural Education graduates at Texas A&M University. It was discovered that students who thought their leadership courses were relevant to their lives had greater career and quality of life satisfaction. From these findings, Dailey recommended offering courses that teach

leadership skills through application and action-items. Dailey noted that students could, therefore, relate their leadership knowledge to their personal agendas.

A study was conducted at the Community College of Denver that evaluated whether or not the leadership programs offered had a positive impact on developing leadership potential (Binard & Brungardt, 1997). Binard and Brungardt measured this positive impact by concentrating on whether the participants applied the knowledge that they had learned from four different leadership programs while at the Community College of Denver.

The four leadership programs were the MOVE Leadership Program, Leadership Development Class, Club Officers, and Student Government Training. The MOVE Leadership Program had students attend eight leadership workshops, seminars, or speakers and complete 10 hours of community service. The Leadership Development Class was an academic course that was based on the Phi Theta Kappa Leadership Program. This course included active and experiential learning techniques that covered topics such as teambuilding, change, communication, and empowerment. The Club Officer program had organization officers attend an orientation meeting, perform their usual duties, and attend a President's Breakfast. Student Government Training included many of the same precepts as the MOVE precepts but also included a leadership conference and a retreat. The findings of this study showed that students who participated in two or more programs were most likely to show more improvement in developing leadership potential. (Binard & Brungardt, 1997)

Cummins (1995) studied college leadership students in various leadership labs at Texas A&M University. Cummins evaluated and measured the attitudes of theses students to see if the attitudes could be changed and maintained over time. This study illustrated no differences in attitudes toward leadership among different groups based on age or gender before training. Participants' attitudes toward leadership were influenced only slightly with training.

Brungardt and Crawford (1996) assessed the academic leadership program at Fort Hays State University (FHSU). Their research was founded on the belief that assessment and the subsequent evaluation of leadership studies needed to focus on students and programmatic elements in order to provide the most comprehensive view of the value of the programming to current and future students. This study evaluated how students felt about the components of the FHSU program along with the improvement of knowledge and skill over time. The researchers used Kirkpatrick's (1976) four traditional methods of, research, knowledge, behavior, and results of, evaluation as their template. They gathered information on reactions or attitudes towards program experiences. The results showed that students agreed or strongly agreed that the courses on leadership that they took enhanced their leadership skills and that the program had met their expectations. The knowledge assessment evaluated the students' comprehension of leadership competencies. Results of this section of the study showed that students had a medium level of

comprehension. The focus of the behavior section looked at whether or not the FHSU Leadership program enhanced students' leadership behavior skills. All five categories tested for showed a positive difference between students who had taken just one leadership course as compared to students who had taken three leadership courses. The last method of assessment, results, investigates whether the total program results in tangible outcomes. The outcome showed that most program participants saw themselves as more effective leaders, their awareness of leadership ability increased, and their drive for gaining leadership roles amplified. Overall, the evaluation of FHSU's Leadership Program showed positive reactions among students toward the program, that they perceived it had increased their knowledge and behavioral skills, and the experience could be related to their becoming more effective leaders.

Finally, Tabke (1999) reviewed experienced leaders and their responses following a leadership course. Using a post-then survey, she found that there was an increase of leadership skills after completing a collegiate leadership course. There was also a significant change in students' attitudes toward leadership from before to after completing collegiate leadership course. Participants also reported an increase in skills in each of the Leadership Skills Inventory scales – working with others, decision-making, positional leadership, understanding of self, and communication. She recommended that the study be replicated in other collegiate leadership classes and that it be continued over time to conclude whether or not the collegiate leadership course is making a difference in knowledge and use of leadership competencies. This investigation of experienced leaders was the catalyst for this study.

Population

The population for this study is experienced collegiate leaders who completed an academic leadership course. The purposive sample (Babbie, 1988) consists of 74 students who were experienced leaders and had completed a collegiate leadership course that consisted of experienced sophomore student leaders. The sample included the 25 members of the Spring 2000 class, 24 members of the Spring 2001 class, and 25 members of the Spring 2002 class.

Methodology

A three-part instrument is used in this study. Responses to each statement were chosen from the five-point Likert scale provided. A higher numeric value for a particular statement indicated a stronger agreement or self-perception of the question.
The first section of the instrument, the concentration of this article, focuses on how much the respondent remembered and used the information (competencies) presented in collegiate leadership class. These leadership competencies included: (a) Trait Theory, (b) Theory X/Theory Y, (c) Task v. Relationship, (d) Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid, (e) Image, (f) Motivation, (g) Situational Leadership,

(h) Delegation, (i) Teams, (j) Tuckman's Team Development Model, (k) Vision, (l) Power, (m) Transactional/Transformational Leadership, and (n) Consensus. These competencies were defined by major theories learned in the course.

Graduate students within the department of Agricultural Education, who had taken an introductory leadership course and faculty who have taught or have taken an introductory leadership course field-tested the instrument. From this field test, the instrument was found to have yielded consistent reliability coefficients.

Each participant was e-mailed the link for the questionnaire. In order to start the surveying process, the participant had to agree to the Informed Consent Form provisions stated and approved by the Institutional Review Board. Each participant was issued a code-number in his or her contact e-mail, to be used for tracking purposes only. The code had to be entered for the student to continue with the survey. Once the student completed the survey and selected the "submit form" button, the information was instantaneously downloaded into an excel spreadsheet that was housed on a secure departmental network.

The members of the purposive sample were collected from the collegiate leadership sophomore leader section course roster. The contact information was assessed from past course records. In November 2002, the sample students were e-mailed, using the information collected from past rosters and class e-mail sheets.

The initial cut-off for respondents was three weeks following receipt of the original email. Thirty-six (49%) respondents replied during the first round of response. At the three week cut-off, a second email was sent. A secondary deadline allowed respondents two weeks to reply. After this second deadline an additional eighteen participants (24%) responded.

To ensure that no non-response bias occurred, early and late submissions were compared as suggested by Linder, Murphy, and Briers (2001). Because the second wave was not the targeted 30 participants, as noted by Linder et al., the responses were tested for non-response by looking at the first 50% and comparing them to the last 50% who responded. No significant differences in means were found in early and late respondents. The confidence level of 0.005 was set a priori.

Findings and Conclusions

Do Students Remember the Competencies?

Hypothesis one stated: Following participation in a structured, collegiate leadership class, there is no difference in student perception of selected leadership competency knowledge among students enrolled in the 2000, 2001, or 2002 classes. To obtain the results for this hypothesis, a ONE-WAY ANOVA and Tukey's post-hoc test were calculated. Findings showed that in 13 leadership

competencies (i.e., Trait Theory, Theory X/Theory Y, Image, Motivation, Situational Leadership, Delegation, Teams, Tuckman's Team Development Model, Vision, Power, Transactional/Transformational, and Consensus) no statistical significance was found among students one, two, and three years after the course (see Table 1).

Table 1

One-way ANOVA with Tukey's Post-Hoc Illustrating Leadership Competency Knowledge by Number of Years Post Collegiate Leadership Course

Leadership Competency	M	SD	F
Task v. Relationship			4.48 2*
Three years post leadership course (2000)	3.11 b	0.900	
Two years post leadership course (2001)	3.67 a	0.594	
One year post leadership course (2002)	3.72 a	0.461	
Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid			4.02 2*
Three years post leadership course (2000)	2.50 a	0.985	
Two years post leadership course (2001)	1.89 b	0.676	
One year post leadership course (2002)	2.67 a	0.907	

Note: [1] Scale 1-4 with 1 = do not remember, 2 = recognize the name, 3 = remember a little, 4 = remember everything

[2] Three years post leadership course n = 16, Two years post leadership course n = 16, One year post leadership course n = 22

[3] Means with different letters are significantly different

* Significant at the .05 level

Therefore, students retained their knowledge over time. It did not matter if they took the leadership course one, two, or three years ago. The students reported the same "amount" of knowledge comprehension in these particular leadership competencies.

There were statistically significant differences found one, two, and three years after the course in the students' self-perceived knowledge of Task v. Relationship

and Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid. Results indicated that students enrolled in the Spring of 2000 had lower self-perceived knowledge in Task v. Relationship than the classes of Spring 2001 and Spring 2002. Results also showed that there was a significant difference between self-perceived knowledge about Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid in the class of 2001 and 2002. The class of 2001 had a lower self-perceived knowledge.

The findings indicate that 13 leadership competencies were, for the most part, remembered the same amount one, two, and three years after a structured collegiate leadership course. It can be concluded that any experienced leader who competed an introductory leadership course as a sophomore can retain certain leadership competencies. This conclusion supports Bennis (1994) who stated that certain aspects of leadership can be learned.

There were statistically significant differences found among the student classes and self-perceived knowledge of Task v. Relationship. In this case, the older students (three years after the course) remembered less about the competency. Although Bennis (1994) suggested that leadership can be learned, it was concluded that, unless it was important to a person's real-time activity, knowledge diminished. Bruck (1997) also stated that courses should include activities to simulate leadership problems. Therefore, if, in post-class activities, a student does not experience the competency, knowledge may be lost.

Similarly, for the Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid competency, the students who took the course two years ago reported they remembered less than the students who took the course one or three years ago. In this case, results indicated an unusual pattern. Since the "middle" class students reported a lower amount of knowledge retention for this subject, it was concluded that, again, this class was not experiencing, and therefore not reinforcing, the Blake and Mouton competency. Although leadership can be learned (Bennis, 1994), it must be practiced (Bruck, 1997).

Do Students Use the Leadership Competencies?

The second hypothesis was developed to ascertain the difference between self-perceived leadership competency use one, two, and three years after participation in a collegiate leadership course. To obtain the results for this hypothesis, a ONE-WAY ANOVA and Tukey's post-hoc test were calculated. Findings showed there was no statistically significant difference between self-perceived leadership competency use and the amount of years post collegiate leadership course (see Table 2). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. In the case of use, students of the leadership course applied the competencies with the same regularity whether they took the course one, two, or three years ago. This conclusion supported the work of Binard and Brungardt (1997) who revealed that students are able to utilize the knowledge they learned in leadership programs. It also supports other

researchers who found that leadership can be learned (Bennis, 1994; Brungardt & Crawford, 1996; Love & Yoder, 1989).

Table 2
One-way ANOVA: Leadership Competency Use Score by Number of Years Post Collegiate Leadership Course

Leadership Competency	M	SD	F
Trait Theory			0.748
Three years post leadership course	2.11	0.758	
Two years post leadership course	2.22	0.943	
One year post leadership course	2.44	0.784	
Theory X Theory Y			0.048
Three years post leadership course	2.33	0.907	
Two years post leadership course	2.39	0.979	
One year post leadership course	2.29	0.849	
Task v. Relationship			0.064
Three years post leadership course	2.83	0.985	
Two years post leadership course	3.44	0.784	
One year post leadership course	3.44	0.856	
Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid			0.103
Three years post leadership course	2.18	1.074	
Two years post leadership course	1.61	0.778	
One year post leadership course	2.17	0.786	
Motivation			0.753
Three years post leadership course	3.50	0.618	
Two years post leadership course	3.61	0.608	
One year post leadership course	3.44	0.784	
Image			1.310
Three years post leadership course	3.22	1.060	
Two years post leadership course	2.67	1.138	
One year post leadership course	2.94	0.873	
Leadership Competency	M	SD	F
Delegation			2.296
Three years post leadership course	3.44	0.616	
Two years post leadership course	3.83	0.383	
One year post leadership course	3.61	0.608	
Teams			2.118

Three years post leadership course	3.67	0.485	
Two years post leadership course	3.78	0.428	
One year post leadership course	3.39	0.778	
Tuckman's Team Development Model			0.584
Three years post leadership course	2.72	1.018	
Two years post leadership course	2.35	1.057	
One year post leadership course	2.50	0.985	
Vision			0.256
Three years post leadership course	3.28	0.895	
Two years post leadership course	3.11	0.676	
One year post leadership course	3.11	0.832	
Power			0.513
Three years post leadership course	3.06	0.998	
Two years post leadership course	2.94	1.162	
One year post leadership course	2.72	0.826	
Transactional and Transformational			1.190
Leadership	1.94	0.802	
Three years post leadership course	2.00	0.970	
Two years post leadership course	2.39	1.037	
One year post leadership course			
Consensus			0.342
Three years post leadership course	2.67	0.840	
Two years post leadership course	2.67	1.138	
One year post leadership course	2.22	1.114	

Note: [1] Scale 1-4 with 1 = do not use, 2 = seldom use, 3 = use on occasion, 4 = use all the time
[2] Three years post leadership course n = 16, Two years post leadership course n = 16, One year post leadership course n = 22

Discussion

Teaching experienced leaders is sometimes a struggle. Experienced collegiate leaders sometimes come into the course feeling that they have learned and experienced all that leadership can offer. The introduction of theory into their leadership erudition gives them the "reason" to the practice.

We acknowledge that the responses of remembering and utilization were self-reported. In a similar study, Hirst, Mann, Bain, Pirola-Merlo, and Richver (2004)

found that their findings support the value of using self-reported learning as an essential to understand leadership development.

Recommendations for Additional Research

The following recommendations were proposed based on the findings of this study:

- It is recommended that this study be replicated five and ten years from now to see if there is a sustained competency knowledge and use.
- It is recommended that supplementary research explore the correlation between each leadership competency knowledge and use.
- It is recommended that additional research looks at the frequencies of each leadership competency to see which competencies are used most.
- It is recommended that research be conducted that compares the leadership competency knowledge and use frequencies to students one, two, and three years post- collegiate leadership course.
- It is recommended that this study be replicated with senior leaders to compare to the findings of this study.
- It is recommended that members in a regular section of a structured leadership course be compared to the population in this study.

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